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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 DJIBOUTI 000613

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR AF, AF/E, AND INR/AA
CJTF-HOA FOR POLAD
LONDON, PARIS, ROME FOR AFRICA-WATCHER

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [KPKO](#) [MOPS](#) [SO](#) [DJ](#) [ER](#) [ET](#)
SUBJECT: SOMALIA: ARS CHAIRMAN OPENS DISCUSSIONS IN
DJIBOUTI BUT PROVIDES LITTLE DETAIL

REF: A. DJIBOUTI 388
[1](#)B. STATE 73519 (NOTAL)

Classified By: ERIC WONG, CHARGE D'AFFAIRES, A.I. REASON: 1.4 (D).

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY. ARS moderates led by Chairman Sheikh Sharif Sheikh Ahmed are meeting in Djibouti from July 19-24 to follow up on talks held under the auspices of the UN SRSG for Somalia in May, and expect to issue a communique tomorrow. On the eve of the conclusion of this ARS General Assembly, Sheikh Sharif rejects as "illegal" recent announcements that Hassan Dahir Aweys has been appointed ARS Chairman in Asmara, noting that the majority of ARS central committee members are in Djibouti. Sheikh Sharif provided little information on the current status of internal ARS deliberations. Instead, he emphasized the need for Ethiopia to withdraw from Somalia; the need for international peacekeepers from countries "close culturally" to Somalia; and the need for continued humanitarian assistance from the international community. As "technical details" of cease-fire implementation and monitoring, as well as political reconciliation, remain ambiguous, hopes for achieving an enduring peace in Somalia remain fleeting. END SUMMARY.

[1](#)2. (SBU) Charge and Emboffs met on July 23 with Sheikh Sharif Sheikh Ahmed (DPOB: 01 Jan. 1966, Jowhar, Somalia), Chairman of the Alliance for the Re-Liberation of Somalia (ARS). Sheikh Sharif was accompanied by four members of the ARS Central Committee: Abourahman Mohamoud Farah (DPOB: 01 Jan 1963 El Bur, Somalia); Mohamed Hassan Ali (AKA Daryeel) (DPOB: 27 Oct. 1970, Djibouti); Mohamed Cheikh Hassan (DPOB: 12 Oct. 1954, Kismayo, Somalia); and Ahmed Hassan Gabobeh (DPOB: 01 Jan. 1958, Mogadishu, Somalia). Sheikh Sharif spoke in Somali, with English interpretation by Mohamed Hassan Ali.

"ILLEGAL" APPOINTMENT OF AWEYS AS ARS HEAD

[1](#)3. (C) Responding to recent press reports that Hassan Dahir Aweys had been elected head of the ARS following a meeting in Asmara, Sheikh Sharif condemned the announcement as "illegal," as there was no quorum of ARS members in Asmara. The appointment of Aweys reflected the will of the Eritrean government, not the will of the Somali people, he said. Some 106 members of the ARS were in Djibouti to attend the July 19-24 ARS General Assembly, whereas those remaining in Asmara totaled 31 or fewer, and would leave Asmara "sooner or later."

[1](#)4. (C) Sheikh Sharif asserted that the ongoing ARS talks in Djibouti were going well, but provided few specific details.

Following the anticipated release of a communique following the assembly's closure on July 24, some ARS Central Committee members would travel to Somalia to sensitize the populace, while others would travel to Mecca, Saudi Arabia. Working with the UN Political Office for Somalia (UNPOS), other ARS members, he said, would address "technical details" of cease-fire implementation and monitoring, as well as political reconciliation.

CONTINUED EMPHASIS ON ETHIOPIAN TROOP WITHDRAWAL

15. (C) Sheikh Sharif highlighted the need for strong engagement by the international community to address three priorities: effecting the Ethiopian military's withdrawal from Somalia and its replacement by UN peacekeepers; providing humanitarian assistance; and supporting peaceful reconciliation. "The main concern is Ethiopia" and the peace process, he said. "If addressed properly," other issues could be worked out. Those who opposed the peace process were "spoilers." Questioned about ARS discussions of a timetable or conditions for Ethiopia's withdrawal from Somalia, Sheikh Sharif said only that some ARS members doubted that Ethiopia would withdraw its troops; terms would be discussed by the relevant committee. Asked whether the ARS had consulted bilaterally with potential troop contributing countries, Sheikh Sharif responded that replacement troops (i.e., serving in a UN peacekeeping operation) should be "close culturally" to the Somali people, as discussed with the UNPOS.

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16. (C) At the same time, he said, the ARS was urging the Somali people to unite and to continue reconciliation, in order to create a government of national unity and to "give hope to the people." Working with business leaders, elders, and clan leaders, the ARS needed to "capitalize on the will of the majority" and to "create a system" that addressed the current political and security vacuum, he said. Asked whether the ARS was representative of all clans, Sheikh Sharif asserted that the majority were Darod. The ARS was comprised of four primary groups: members of the former Union of Islamic Courts, "free" parliamentarians, the Somali diaspora, and intellectuals. The ARS focused on "who can contribute," not on clans per se, he said.

17. (C) Asked whether the ARS would allow "spoilers", especially those facing international charges, to be surrendered to international authorities, Sheikh Sharif said the issue would have to be addressed through continued discussions. The ARS expected "some resistance," he added, as some individuals used Ethiopia's military presence in Somalia as "a pretext" for their own actions. On ARS views of Somaliland, Sheikh Sharif acknowledged that Hargeisa authorities had "created stability," but said that they "can not stand separately."

ARS WELCOMES SUPPORT FROM THE USG

18. (C) Sheikh Sharif welcomed what he said was a change in U.S. policy, and called for continued diplomatic, political, and economic support from the USG. The U.S. could play two key roles, he concluded: (1) addressing humanitarian needs, such as the food crisis, and (2) delivering a message to Ethiopia, in regional and international arenas, that Ethiopia needed to withdraw from Somalia.

ECHOES THEMES OF JULY 19 OPENING CEREMONY

19. (U) Sheikh Sharif underscored similar themes in his

address at the July 19 opening ceremony of the ARS General Assembly, held at the Government of Djibouti's "Palais du Peuple," a Chinese-built auditorium. An audience of approximately 170 attended the opening ceremony; speakers included ARS Central Committee Chairman Sharif Hassan Sheikh Aden, Sheikh Sharif, the French Ambassador to Djibouti (representing the European Union), and Palestine's representative (dean of Djibouti's diplomatic corps, who announced that the Arab League would try to provide funds for Somalia's humanitarian needs). Somali poet Mahamud Abdullah Isse, a fugitive who fled from Minnesota and is wanted on charges of sexual misconduct with a child (REF B), delivered an oration in Somali that was warmly received.

¶10. (U) In his July 19 opening remarks (delivered in Somali with simultaneous English interpretation), Sheikh Sharif said the purpose of the ARS was to reverse the "illegal occupation of Somalia by Ethiopian troops, through all legal means." The ARS had not only succeeded politically in condemning "this illegal occupation," but had also succeeded militarily, he asserted, pausing to recognize the families of fallen "martyrs." The crux of the Djibouti agreement reached in May was that Ethiopian troops should leave Somali territory, to be replaced by international peacekeepers from countries "that know about Somali culture;" furthermore, Somalis should unite to discuss peaceful reconciliation. This agreement had been followed by "debates, discussions, and clarifications" among ARS members in Sana'a, where a 13-person committee had been established. The purpose of the July 19-24 General Assembly in Djibouti was to implement the May agreement; the ARS was also "asking our brothers from Asmara to debate these points."

¶11. (U) Somalis needed a government that "helps people alleviate their pain: people shouldn't come to us, we should go to the people." Decrying ongoing killings and abductions (especially of civilians and international aid workers), he underscored the need for Somalis to unite to find common ground. Lack of security hampered humanitarian assistance, and the rising price of commodities was a burden for the ARS. Somalia was plagued by destruction of property, internal displacement, and counterfeit currency. Health facilities

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and schools were closed; many schools had been destroyed or "used as bases" by Ethiopian troops. Asserting that the ARS wanted peace, Sheikh Sharif said it would be "a historic breakthrough" if those who had brought Ethiopian troops to Somalia effected their withdrawal. Many opportunities had been wasted in the past; if the TFG was ready for peace, "we are ready for it."

¶12. (C) COMMENT. As a seeming advocate of peaceful reconciliation and humanitarian assistance for Somalia, Sheikh Sharif is far more palatable an interlocutor than al-Qaida-associated Hassan Dahir Aweys. However, as his public and private comments underscore, effecting Ethiopia's military withdrawal from Somalia remains a key priority for the ARS. In the absence of any timetable for Ethiopian withdrawal, and the inability to field a UN peacekeeping operation expeditiously, Sheikh Sharif's moderates will face increasing pressure and risk losing popular support to more extremist hardliners. END COMMENT.
WONG